



10

## NATIVE NEWS

Native News compiled by  
Dyani Bingham  
(dyani\_b@hotmail.com)  
for *State of the Arts*

# Art and Storytelling

## Monte Yellow Bird “shoots from the heart”

By Jamie McCrary  
Reprinted with permission from  
the National Endowment for the Arts,  
excerpted from *NEA Arts Magazine*

Arts education isn't just a means of learning an artistic skill or practice; it is also a unique tool for learning about different cultures and perspectives. Multicultural arts programs help students look outside of themselves, encouraging them to explore and experience other ways of life.

The Holter Museum of Art in Helena is doing just this with its Cultural Crossroads program. Supported by the NEA, Cultural Crossroads brings diverse artists into the museum for two-week teaching residencies, including a residency with Native-American painter and ledger artist Monte Yellow Bird.

Better known in the art world as Black Pinto Horse, Yellow Bird is Hidatsa and Arikara from the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. His artistic focus is mainly in painting and ledger art, an art form traditional to the Plains Indians ...

But creating art is only part of what Yellow Bird considers to be his career. A storyteller and an educator, Yellow Bird is devoted to passing on the teachings of his people, and shares his stories with a passion and an openness to anyone wishing to listen. He wove storytelling throughout his workshops with Cultural Crossroads, which gave him the opportunity to work with more than 250 students.

Speaking with Yellow Bird served as a reminder of how arts education has the power to cultivate connections between both cultures and individuals.

**NEA:** How would you describe your approach to arts education?

**Monte Yellow Bird:** The foundation of my life and career is art, giving, and education. My livelihood as an artist, storyteller, and educator chose me, art being my first love.

When we go out to do an educational program, I don't go in front of a mirror and practice my lecture. I try to shoot from the heart because it's natural, and I want to continue to be natural. I think my education programming comes from really trying to live that ...

**NEA:** What has been the most fulfilling part of being an artist-in-residence with the Cultural Crossroads program?

Yellow Bird: I think the most fulfilling part is when participants make an emotional connection to your work and teachings. Some of the participants were teachers and volunteers.

I wasn't just talking to kids. I was addressing everybody as a responsible, equal individual.

**NEA:** In what ways do you use storytelling in your educational programs, and why is it important?

**Yellow Bird:** When I talk about my work in public, I talk about the process that led to the final images, and I have stories that are associated with that. These stories and teachings are really important to pass on to the younger generations.



Monte Yellow Bird helps a young artist put the finishing touches on a clay sculpture.

(Photo by Emily Real Bird)

We're starting to lose the [verbal] passing on of stories and traditions because of technology ... Storytelling really engages another part of their mind, and helps them to develop their imagination.

The important thing, too, is all the different morals in stories ... What I'm doing is empowering them. I tell them that they are not just students, but participants. I'm actively engaging them in their future.

**NEA:** Could you talk about your ledger art and your paintings?

**Yellow Bird:** ... During the era of ledger art, our people were forced to change, but we maintained a lot of good solid values and respect. The depictions really emulated that era. The process of doing ledger art is emulating qualities that are important to us, and I think that's what I want to say with my ledger art.

I don't follow a traditional style because I don't live in that time, but I'm bringing that era forward by using my style ...

**NEA:** How would you explain the development of your current artistic style?

**Yellow Bird:** I was raised in a very Catholic-oriented family, yet still maintained connections with my Native culture. The idea of spirituality was always a basic seed in the development of my art. Becoming academically educated through art was also a really important step for me. Studying art helped me to understand other people's views, history, connections or disconnections, functions or dysfunctions – and [helped me] know that they were just as human as everybody else ...

**NEA:** How do you feel education fits into your overall goals as an artist?

**Yellow Bird:** Because my work is so different, education is key – it's just part of it. You have to educate your public about your work ...

**NEA:** What are some meaningful experiences that have come out of teaching residencies you've done?

**Yellow Bird:** There was one week-long program we did in Belt, Montana. We talked about line, shape, and all of the different artistic elements, but we also talked about emotional connection in our work.

At the end of the week it was time for students to get up and communicate about their projects. Of course, these were high school kids, so nobody wanted to get up and talk about their emotions in front of their peers.

There was a younger guy who must have been about a freshman that came from the back of the classroom and said, "I'll be first." I swear you could hear a pin drop in that room. They were looking at him like he was running on water.

After the program when we were packing up, the art teacher came over and was very emotional. He said, "That boy that came up first, did you know he's autistic?" I couldn't believe it. He told me that he'd never seen him get up in front of anyone before, and he usually only whispers to people ... It really touched my heart.

These are the things that tell you that you're doing the right thing. I think that's our job: to be able to support that little bit of something that makes people go a little bit further.

**This article originally appeared in NEA Arts, the quarterly magazine of the National Endowment for the Arts. Read the whole story at [arts.gov/NEARTS/2013v1-engaged-and-empowered/art-and-storytelling](http://arts.gov/NEARTS/2013v1-engaged-and-empowered/art-and-storytelling).**

### First Peoples Fund programs

**2016 Artist in Business Leadership:** The First Peoples Fund's Artist in Business Leadership Program is an independent business arts fellowship program that features a working capital grant of \$5,000 to be used to support a one-year marketing plan/strategy or business goal as defined by the artist applicant.

Artists will receive technical assistance, a professional network of peers, as well as travel funds to participate in FPF's individualized professional development workshops. The fellowship also provides a focus on new works to stimulate creativity and a renewal of energy in Native art expression.

**2016 Cultural Capital Grant:** This program provides tradition bearers of tribal communities the opportunity to further their important cultural work. The program is designed to support previous year Community Spirit Award recipients allowing them to commit more time to teaching and sharing their ancestral knowledge and practices.

The grant program will help artists develop local networks and provide technical assistance and capacity-building support as needed.

Each grant gives \$5,000 to the recipient; application deadline is Sept. 15.

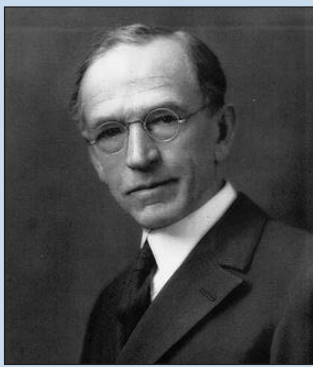
Visit [www.firstpeoplesfund.org](http://www.firstpeoplesfund.org), call 605-348-0324 or email [miranne@firstpeoplesfund.org](mailto:miranne@firstpeoplesfund.org)

## Frank Bird Linderman's *Wolf and the Winds* headed to film

After months of talks it's official, Wild Horses productions has obtained the motion picture rights to the book *Wolf and the Winds* by Frank Bird Linderman, a Montana writer, politician, Native American ally and ethnographer who died in 1938.

*Wolf and the Winds* tells the story of the decline of traditional life for Plains Indian tribes and the rise of commercialization of the West. The narrative of the story is through the eyes of Wolf, a spiritual leader, who devoted his life to saving his people from western encroachment and the loss of traditional life-ways.

*Wolf and the Winds* is Linderman's fictionalized account of Wolf's humble and solitary life of courage and sacrifice, taking place during the mid to late 1800s in and around Fort Benton, the birthplace of the



Frank Bird Linderman

state of Montana. The film will be shot in the Fort Benton area.

The story of the film will start in 1916 with the son of Wolf telling the story to Linderman, and then it will flash back to 1840. This structure will make it possible to use English narration while maintaining and preserving the actual spoken language of each tribe throughout the film.

Wild Horses Productions plans to hire Native American consultants, writers, actors, and crew and seeks collaboration with three tribes: the A'aninin, Chippewa Cree and Blackfeet.

Two main set pieces will help recreate the birthplace of Montana. The first one is the original fort of Fort Benton along the Missouri River and the second is the U.S. Montana steamboat. Both set pieces will be created by

the combination of building parts of them and the use of CGI techniques. The final result will be the image of the U.S. Montana steamboat pulling up to Fort Benton loading and unloading goods and supplies.

The project is in its early stage. Wild Horses Productions is in the process of preparing the outline of the screenplay and the illustrations for the production design. The company welcomes any inquiries, comments and/or suggestions. Wild Horses Productions principal Robin P. Murray has produced and directed two other feature films in Montana: "Season of Change" starring Michael Madsen, Nicholle Tom and Hoyt Axton, and "The Flying Dutchman" starring Eric Roberts and Rod Steiger.

Wild Horses Productions has been producing and directing feature films and documentaries for 30 years. Visit [www.wildhorsesproductions.com](http://www.wildhorsesproductions.com) for more information, or email [robin@wildhorsesproductions.com](mailto:robin@wildhorsesproductions.com).